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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted by the Gallup Organization to determine how workers plan and prepare for work and what conditions and activities influence worker performance in the United States. Telephone interviews were conducted with a cross-section of 1,006 adults, 735 of whom were employed outside the home. The survey found that many workers are changing or expect to change jobs. Problems in the workplace seem to be the underlying factors related to job change. Poor planning may also account for career change, showing an overwhelming need for student and worker assistance in career planning and use of information. The study showed a lack of such resources and/or a failure of persons, especially minorities, to use the career planning resources that were available. The survey also showed that a large number of minorities still believe that discrimination is a barrier, and requests for employees to perform illegal or unethical activities are a major concern. As a result of the study, nine recommendations for change were made. The recommendations deal with improving vocational education, improving career counseling programs both in schools and in businesses, teaching about ethics, and increasing affirmative action. (KC)

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Planning For and Working in America:

Report of a National Survey

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National Career Development Association

Founded in 1913 as the National Vocational Guidance Association

TO: Governmental, Business, Labor, and Educational Leaders

FROM: Duane Brown, President

DATE: May 1, 1988

I am pleased to make the results of a poll conducted by the Gallup Organization pertaining to planning and preparation for work, and conditions and activities that influence worker performance in this country available to you as a public service of the National Career Development Association. It has been sent to over 2000 business, educational, and governmental leaders across the country.

The Gallup Organization was commissioned to conduct a survey on various aspects of work in America by the National Career Development Association, the National Center for Research on Vocational Education, and the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee. However, the contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the National Career Development Association. NCDA's primary concern is the improvement of career planning and career development throughout the life span. My hope is that the information contained herein will stimulate you to join with us in assisting youth and adults to make good career decisions, advance in their careers, and contribute to their own well-being, the welfare of their employers, and to this country.

The National Career Development Association believes that planning and preparing for, and advancing in one's career has not received the attention it deserves in this country. For most of us, the choice of a career is the most important decision we make. From a societal point of view, an informed, highly motivated workforce is essential to our national well-being. From the individual's perspective, a sense of personal well-being is closely linked to being a productive worker. We also hope that you will join us in developing public policy that will enhance these vital processes.

We also hope you will give us your response to the information that we are providing. It is our hope that this will be the first in a series of surveys that will highlight career preparation, career planning, and career development needs. Your input will be useful in helping us shape future surveys.

Thank you for your attention to this matter of national concern.

Gallup Survey Report
Major Findings

Workers on the Move — The overall findings of the survey suggest that many American workers are changing or expect to change jobs. For example:

- In the year prior to the survey, 10% or nearly 11 million workers said they said they needed help in selecting, changing, or obtaining a job.
- Only 63% of those surveyed expect to stay in their current job over the next three years. Only 41% of the 18–25 age group expect to stay in their jobs during this period.
- Approximately 4.5% of the workforce expect to be forced to seek other employment because of business closings or related happenings. Over 20% expect to change jobs by choice, while about 6.5% expect to leave the labor force permanently.
- The bottom line is that nearly 28 million workers expect to change jobs in the next three years.

Underlying Causes of Career Change — Problems in the workplace see to be underlying factors related to change.

- 45% had experienced significant job stress.
- 33% indicated that they had experienced significant conflict between work and family or personal relationships. No appreciable differences between men and women were reported.
- Workers seem unmotivated. Only about 7% said they could not accomplish more on the job.
- 50% said their skills and abilities are being very well used on the job;
  12% said their talents are not being well used.

Overwhelming Need for Assistance in Career Planning and Use of Information.

- Poor planning may also account for career change.
- Only about 39% said they had a career plan to begin with, and 64% said that if they could start over, they would get more information about their potential choices.
- About 15% of those who needed help did not know where to go. Nearly 2 1/2 times as many blacks as whites gave this response.

- Friends and relations were the most relied-upon sources of assistance, a source relied upon by many of the workers who are apparently unhappy in their current positions.
- One-third used professional counselors in their planning. Only about 1/5 of the women and black Americans surveyed used professional assistance.
- One-third said that adults have access to the kind of information they need to make career choices, but 55% disagreed.
- One in five Hispanics and blacks said they have access to the information they need.
- Nearly half said that even if information is available, adults do not know how to use it.
- Nearly 38% engaged in self-directed activities when choosing and changing jobs.
- High school graduates believed that their basic educational skills courses were their most important preparatory experience for work, but for those who had received technical training, these preparatory experiences were rated as being as important as basic skills courses.

Illegal Activities and Discrimination a Problem in the Workplace — Large numbers of minorities still believe that discrimination is a barrier, and requests for employees to perform illegal or unethical activities are a major concern.

- 57% of the total group said that there is no discrimination in the workplace, but only about 38% of the black minorities agreed.
- Over 13% said there is reverse discrimination, that is, women and minorities are given preferential treatment. Only about 4.5% and 8% of the blacks and women, respectively, surveyed agreed.
- About 14% of the full-time workers said that they had been asked to do something illegal or unethical on the job, although 20% of the black workers in the survey indicated that this type of request had been made of them.
- One-third of those asked to perform illegal or unethical acts did so, 47% refused, and 12% pretended to cooperate, but did not. Six percent quit their jobs rather than cooperate.

Background

In early 1987, the National Career Development Association, the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, and the National Center for Research on Vocational Education commissioned the Gallup Organization of Princeton, New Jersey to conduct a survey regarding planning for careers, including the use of occupational information, current attitudes toward work, and the perceived utility of certain experiences in the preparation for work. The three organizations were also interested in determining the extent to which job discrimination and illegal and/or unethical business practices were present in the workplace.

In November of 1987, a representative national cross-section of 1,006 adults, 18 and older, were interviewed by telephone. Of the 1,006 adults interviewed, 735 were employed outside the home. The results reported in this document that relate to employed adults are based on the small sample, and the possibility exists that the results in the total population of workers could vary by as much as 5% in either direction. The results for the total sample could vary as much as 4% in either direction.

When reading these results, two figures should be kept in mind. Results from the total population generalize to about 170 million adults and, thus, if 10% of the American population subscribe to a particular idea, 17 million adults hold this belief. The second figure to remember is that there are approximately 113 million people in the workforce. If the survey reports that 10% of the employed adults believe that they are underemployed, that translates to approximately 11.3 million people.

Explication of Findings

At the outset, some of the major findings of the Gallup Survey were reported. In this section, some of those findings will be discussed in more detail, and some of the interesting parallels that appear in the results will be explored.

Workers on the Move

The fact that nearly 11 million workers needed assistance in selecting, changing, or obtaining a job in the year prior to the survey is a significant figure. However, an examination of some of the sub-samples in the survey sharpens the focus on this problem. Over 20% of the 18–25 year-olds, 12.5% of the 26–40 year-olds, and nearly 24% of the blacks indicated that they needed assistance. Young workers and black Americans are the ones who seem to be struggling most with getting a job, a finding that confirms what various other surveys have shown.

When 18–25 year-olds and blacks were asked to project themselves ahead for three years with regard to incumbency in their current position, 41% and 45%, respectively, or less than half, expected to stay in their current positions, which suggests that their need for assistance will continue. Over 9% of the young worker group and 6.2% of the black worker group expect to be forced to change jobs in the next three years.

The labor force is on the move. Anually, nearly 28 million workers expect to change jobs, 5 million of which expect to be forced to change their employment. However,

among young and black workers, the sheer numbers who will change and will, in all likelihood, need assistance is significant.

Causes of Career Change

No cause-and-effect relationships can be implied on the basis of survey data. However, the results do provide some basis for speculating about the causes of the changes.

The picture of the American worker that emerges is that they are not performing to capacity but could be motivated to do more by a variety of factors. Adults surveyed were asked to list factors that would motivate them to do more on the job, and while 7% said they could do no more, the following sources of motivation to do more were listed. More money (35%), more recognition (38%), more control on the job (24%), opportunity for advancement (33%), and if I felt my job was more important (15%). Receiving more money was ranked first by 18–25 year-olds and black workers, more recognition was listed first by Hispanics and 26–40 year-old workers. For the latter group, seeing the possibility for advancement was also considered as an important source of motivation.

Interestingly, workers in the 41–55 category were much more likely to indicate that they could not accomplish more on the job, but listed recognition, money, and advancement as their most powerful sources of motivation for higher peformance. The important, but not surprising, finding here is that there are important sources of motivation that are of little cost to the employer, and may keep workers in their current jobs.

Lack of productivity may also be attributable to under utilization of talent. About 47% of adults believed that their talents were being used very well, while additional 31% felt that their talents were used fairly well. Young, Hispanic, part-time, and clerical and sales workers believed that their skills were less well utilized than other groups. Professional and businesss workers viewed their situations more favorably with 56.7% indicating that their skills were used very well. Interestingly, two thirds of those who did not complete high school believed that their skills were being used very well.

Workers may also be seeking jobs that produce less job stress and/or less conflict with their personal lives. Nearly 14% of adults experienced stress that interfered with their job performance, 16% that interfered with off-the-job relationships, and about 15% said that stress had interfered with their physical health. Over 14% of working adults said that they had experienced either a great deal of conflict between either their work and family or personal relationships, a figure which corresponds quite closely to the 16% that indicated that stress had influenced their off-the-job relationships.

More men reported experiencing a great deal of conflict between personal or family relationships than did women (16.2% vs. 12.4%) but when the two categories of experiencing quite a lot of conflict and a great deal of conflict were combined, little gender differences were in evidence. Working black and Hispanic workers reported slightly more conflict with off-the-job relationships than did other groups. Married workers reported slightly more conflict than non-married workers and workers with children experienced significantly more conflict than those with no kids (41.3% vs. 26.1%). Having children also seemed to slightly increase reports of stress on the job, although younger workers seemed to be most affected by job stress.

Only 14% of working adults indicate that work is the most important life role, and over 75% indicate that their personal relationships with family and others is the most important life role. Leisure was rated as their most important role by 7.4% of the working adults, although more males than females (8.6% vs. 6.0%) ranked leisure first. A greater proportion of black (16.2%) and young workers (12.8%) ranked leisure first. The age groups that ranked work as most important and leisure as least important were the 56–65 and 66+ groups. For these groups, work was ranked as most important by 20.9% and 30.6% respectively. It should be remembered that these groups exclude retired workers, however.

Finally, while some of the reasons that so many workers expect to change jobs are probably attributable to external factors such as the nature of the workplace and conflict with personal relationships and other life roles, a major factor seems to have been poor planning. About 38% of working adults indicated that they made a conscious choice and followed a definite plan to their present career, and only 32% of the black and 33.7% of the Hispanic workers in the sample gave this reply. Getting started through a series of choice circumstances (23.1%), responding to the influence of parents or relatives (9.6%), being influenced by friends and associates (10.5%), and taking the only job available (13.4%) were the other reasons for being in current positions.

Need for and Sources of Career Planning Assistance

As was stated at the outset, 9.7% of adults indicated that they needed assistance with job selection and changing the year before the survey was conducted. The workers who tried to get help turned to friends or relatives (45.5%), professional counselors (31.2%), or did not know where to go (15.0%). A large percentage (11.5%) did not actually look for help. Males and the respondents who had gone to college were the most likely to seek professional help. Females, young workers, black workers, and workers who had not finished high school were least likely to seek help. Only about 11% of the high school dropouts indicated that they had used a professional counselor, and over one-quarter indicated that they did not know where to go for assistance.

When one considers that about 38%, or nearly 43 million, of the current workers did not have a definite plan, and about 60%, or nearly 68 million of this group, either did not know where to go or are getting help from friends and relatives, a problem of major proportions emerges.

Those surveyed were asked what types of resources had been utilized at any time for advice or help in changing jobs or getting assistance with job-related problems. Many had at some time gone to a resource person such as a school or college counselor (14.7%), or a job service counselor (8.0%). However, only 4.7% of those who had not finished school had ever used a school counselor for career-related assistance. This group had used employment security counselors at a higher rate than other groups, with 11.2% indicating that they had used this resource. Eight percent of the total group had used a private employment agency.

Self-directed activities such as visits to libraries, reading classified advertisements, or taking interest inventories was the most popular source of assistance with job-related problems. Nearly 38% said they had engaged in this approach. The group who had not finished high school and black respondents had pursued these activities least with 23.8% and 28.7% respectively responding that they had used this approach.

While self-directed activities appear to be a worthwhile approach for many, significant data about access to and understanding of career-related information emerged from the survey. Over 48% of the adults surveyed indicated that adults do not understand how to interpret and use information to make intelligent career choices. Additionally, 33% said that adults have access to occupational information, while over 55% said that they need assistance in getting access to career-related information. Only about 22–24% of those who did not finish high school and black and Hispanic respondents indicated that adults have sufficient access to career-related information.

Adults varied considerably in the extent to which they viewed various life and educational experiences as important sources of assistance in helping them get their first job. Over 50% of those who did not finish high school indicated that they had no experiences that prepared them for work. On the other hand, 73.7% of college graduates pointed to their programs of study as helpful. High school and technical school graduates tended to single out courses that taught occupational competencies and basic skills (30.4% vs. 29.6%) as helpful. Apprenticeships, correspondence courses, government-sponsored training programs, and the military service were also listed. Males in general, and black and Hispanic workers tended to rate military experience as useful. The 41–65 year-old workers also singled out the military as a useful means of preparing for a career.

Nearly two-thirds of all adults followed no definite plan to get started in their current job. It is particularly noteworthy that blacks, young workers, and those who did not finish high school, the groups expressing the greatest need, are apparently not utilizing productive methods in their attempts to find a rewarding place in the job market.

While over 63% of adults in general would get more information if they could start over, relying on friends and relatives and self-directed activities are likely to produce less than desirable results in the search for new careers. Basic skills and occupationally oriented courses seem likely to be useful in finding a new career.

Job Discrimination and Other Illegal/Unethical Activities

This country has been engaged in a battle against discrimination in the workplace for over 25 years. More recently, illegal activities such as insider trading on Wall Street and illegal dumping of chemicals have made us aware of other ethical and illegal activities in the workplace. The data collected on illegal and unethical activities suggest that there is still much work to be done.

With regard to discrimination, over 57% of adult workers said that they perceived no discrimination in the workplace. However, 4.5% of this group said minorities are

discriminated against, but women are not; 7.9% said women are discriminated against but not minorities; nearly 12% said that both women and minorities are discriminated against; and over 13% said that there is reverse discrimination, that is, women and minorities are given preferential treatment to white males. Males were more than twice as likely than females to indicate that reverse discrimination exists (17.9% vs. 8.1%) and white respondents were three times as likely to give this response as black respondents (14.4% vs. 4.6%).

Among black workers, 38% responded that there is no discrimination, and as a group, were much more likely to indicate that both women and minorities are discriminated against, but not white men.

Generally, females perceive discrimination in the workplace as more prevalent than males, except for the matter of reverse discrimination. Women were more likely than men to believe that both minorities and women experience discrimination (14.3% vs. 9.5%) and that women are discriminated against, but not men (9.4% vs. 6.6%).

In response to a question regarding whether they had ever been asked to perform an illegal or unethical act on the job, 12% of the general sample and 14% of the full-time workers answered in the affirmative. Among the various occupational groups, 17% of those workers in the business and professional groups said that they had been asked to perform an illegal or professional act. Minorities were much more likely to have been asked to perform illegal or unethical acts than whites, with over 20% of the black and over 18% of the Hispanic workers indicating that this type of request had been made, and only 10.5% of the white workers responding in the affirmative.

The most usual response to a request to perform an illegal or unethical act was to refuse. Nearly half of all workers refused to cooperate outright. However, women were less likely to directly refuse than men (40.6% vs. 52.6%), and more likely to pretend to cooperate but not actually participate (15.1% vs. 9.7%). Women were also much more likely to quit their jobs than men (9.7% vs. 3.2%) rather than cooperate. Blue collar and part-time employees were also much more likely to cooperate.

Recommendations for Change

1. **It is recommended that while we are strengthening our basic educational system we pay equal attention to improving vocational education.** A number of recommendations for strengthening career planning come from the survey itself. For example, 52% said not enough emphasis is being placed on preparing non-college bound students for careers, and 44% said that there is not enough emphasis on this area for all students including college bound. The data suggest that both basic skills and vocational education courses are useful on the job. These data strengthen the case for the current national emphasis on basic skills development, and are supportive of current efforts at the national level to strengthen vocational education.

2. **State and local agencies involved in helping youngsters and adults should re-emphasize their efforts, not only in helping people to access occupational information, but to develop the skills necessary to use it in career decision making. It is also recommended that non-traditional methods such as sections in community libraries devoted to occupational information and exploring careers be established.** There is strong support for the idea that people in our society need increased access to occupational information as well as improved ability to use it.

3. **Public school and postsecondary counseling, career counseling and development programs should be strengthened and expanded to provide services to those groups at greatest risk. Programs should serve all youth and adults needing career planning and assistance.** Throughout the past two decades, numerous efforts have been undertaken to improve career counseling in public schools and elsewhere. Professional counselors ranked second to friends and relatives as sources of assistance in career planning, and over a quarter of adults either did not look for assistance or did not know where to look. Only 17% of the adults of the sample had gone to school or college counselors for assistance. Twelve percent of the high school graduates and 7% of the dropouts had used school counselors.

4. **Businesses should accelerate the development and improvement of career development programs that allow employees to seek new career options within the company. They should also accentuate their efforts to alleviate job stress and enhance life role relationships.** Currently, many businesses are actively involved in establishing career development programs for their employees. They are also establishing employee assistance programs to assist with family and other problems that may negatively influence work performance. The data in this survey suggest that these steps are appropriate. However, many businesses and industries have not responded to these needs. Career development programs and the job stress and conflicts experienced between jobs and other areas of adults' lives can be positively impacted by these programs.

5. **American business needs to seriously consider the means by which employees are compensated and look seriously : placing greater emphasis upon involving workers more directly in making decisions that influence the workplace.** Productivity is the key to economic well-being in this country. A part of the current malaise in the workforce may well be due to the failure of American business and industry to acknowledge the contributions of American workers and to involve them in decision making that will permit input into corporate policy and a greater sense of worth in their own jobs.

6. **Legislators and members of state boards of education should give serious consideration to enacting legislation and developing policies that stimulate more attention on career development and career planning specifically.** New career development programs cost money. However, altering the priorities of programs can often be done at little cost.

7. **All career development programs devote time to identifying and dealing with illegal and/or unethical issues in the workplace.** Sixty-one percent of the respondents indicated that not enough emphasis is being placed upon the development of moral and ethical character in our public schools. Given the percentage of workers who are asked to perform illegal and/or unethical acts, it seems that adults are aware of an important issue in our society. Students, workers, and managers need to be taught how to deal with ethical and legal problems in the workplace.

8. **Existing programs and any new ones that may be developed should give minorities and the under-educated a high priority.** The under-educated and minorities indicated the greatest problems in their career choice making and their attempts to deal with them.

9. **Affirmative action programs and other efforts such as mentoring programs for women and minorities need to be strengthened if equity and fairness are to be achieved.** Discrimination in the workplace still is a problem.

For More Information

In January 1989 a 100-page monograph dealing with the problems of planning for and working in America will be published. The document will contain a complete presentation of the Gallup survey data mentioned in this booklet and will also draw upon other major reports and research studies.

To receive more information about this forthcoming publication write to E. Niel Carey, Executive Director, National Career Development Association, 10214 Blandford Way, Ellicott City, MD 21043.